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SUBJECT: MILGROUP BOGOTA (3) -- MODERNIZING PERSONNEL
MANAGEMENT

REF: BOGOTA 1246

Summary

¶1. Colombian military personnel do not have military occupational specialties (MOS) and hence cannot be categorized according to training, experience, or expertise. The military also does not have a computerized system to track personnel, which causes inefficiencies and gaps in deployments for key positions like pilots, mechanics, and technicians. Over the next two years, the U.S. military plans to assist in the modernization of Colombian military personnel management -- defining operating specialties, formulating career paths for advancement, and transferring records to an electronic data base. Defense Minister Santos said this "management by competencies" approach was at the heart of his educational and doctrinal reforms (reftel). End Summary.

¶2. This is the third in a series of cables profiling activities of the U.S. Military Group (MILGP) in Bogota. Its missions (Army, Navy, Air Force, Logistics, and Air Component Coordination Element) provide equipment, training and advice to the respective arms of the Colombian military.

Military Has No Occupational Specialties

¶3. The Colombian military does not have occupational specializations, which means personnel are undifferentiated by training, experience, or expertise. The Colombian Navy, for instance, recognizes its entire Marine Corps under a single job title (Infantry), though the Corps is double the size of the regular Navy. Marines trained in intelligence work can be assigned as gunners, mechanics, or administrators. The Colombian Air Force counts each unit's officers and NCOs by rank, not skill. Pilots are not distinguished by whether they fly fixed-wing or rotary aircraft, attack or transport aircraft, and mechanics are not specified for aircraft repair or truck repair. To earn promotion, Army Aviation officers must command ground troops, taking away helicopter pilots who are rare and expensive to train. Lacking a warrant officer program, the Colombian military cannot keep experienced non-commissioned personnel like pilots in their positions while rewarding them for their experience with promotions and salary increases.

No Career Paths; No Data Base

¶4. Career paths are inefficient and ad hoc due to the lack of job specialties and the absence of computerized personnel tracking. Officers and NCOs lack clear guidance on duty and training requirements for advancement. Army assignments during an initial platoon command are inconsistent -- some officers serve long periods, others move quickly. Services have individual intranets, but only the Police system functions well. Most data is held in paper files, and no software exists to transfer records among military branches, units and departments (e.g. commands, human resources, finance, training, etc.). Screening of candidates for onward assignment is done by sharing hardcopy documents. These problems carry far-reaching consequences: skills not catalogued cannot be fully utilized, training of new personnel can be redundant, and qualified candidates are overlooked. Levels of technical development and quality control are uneven, and planners have no way to assess staffing or training needs in key areas. U.S. military observers have expressed amazement that the Colombians have sustained the war and a massive expansion with such antiquated personnel methods.

Two-Year Transformation

¶5. The U.S. military has committed to assist Colombia with reforms in education and doctrine, which rest on modernized personnel management. Coordinated by MILGP, the U.S. plans to provide guidance and U.S. templates to assist the Colombian military in a two-year transformation of its staffing and training functions. The first step, a diagnostic exercise to inventory skills and competencies across the services and create specialty job codes (or MOSs) is underway. A four-day seminar slated for September will introduce senior human resources officers to U.S. personnel management and prepare the officers for up to six weeks of workshops with U.S. teams to refine modernization plans and timetables. Over two years of follow-up collaboration, including visits to U.S. personnel units and the creation of a PATT team to oversee the process, the goal is to create career tracks and computer systems to manage the Colombian military's human capital more productively.

Keystone of MoD Reforms

¶6. The military will build its educational and doctrinal reform around the modernization effort, which Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos calls "management by competencies." Santos said the new specialties and career tracks would determine training requirements, and lead to an overhaul of a wide range of personnel processes, including assignments, promotions, and definitions of equivalence of positions across branches. The transformation effort will concentrate first on active duty members of the armed forces, but it can be expanded to incorporate recruitment and retirement issues.
Drucker